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Review of Libraries, Mission & Marketing: Writing Mission Statements That Work and The Visible Librarian: Asserting Your Value with Marketing and Advocacy

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LIBRARIES, MISSION & MARKETING: WRITING MISSION STATEMENTS THAT WORK. Linda K. Wallace. *Chicago: American Library Association, 2004. 82 pp. \$27.00. ISBN 0-8389-0867-5.*

THE VISIBLE LIBRARIAN: ASSERTING YOUR VALUE WITH MARKETING AND ADVOCACY. Judith A. Siess. *Chicago: American Library Association, 2003, 154pp. \$30.00. ISBN 0-8389-0848-9.*

I read these two books during a long airplane trip from one coast to the other. Both were short and easy to read and I had time to really concentrate on them. As I finished one and picked up the other, it struck me how complementary they are. *The Visible Librarian* outlines the steps that librarians need to take to ensure that the value of libraries, and more specifically, the value of your library, is known to its constituents. Siess writes, “We have been invisible far too long. It is time to take off our cloak of invisibility, timidity, complacency, and modesty and reveal ourselves to the world as we really are and can be—The *Visible Librarian*” (p. 121). She outlines exactly how any librarian can put forth this effort in five chapters. However, Siess devoted only two pages to what a mission and/or vision statement can do for a library. She states that “a vision statement is what you would like the library to be” and that “a mission statement expresses what the library does” but she doesn’t give any other advice on how to create either one or describe how these two tools can be put to good use (p. 55).

Wallace, on the other hand, does exactly this, although, as the title suggests, she does limit her comments to mission statements. One might say that she explains why, in a book such as Siess’s, so little attention is given to the writing of vision and mission statements. “Evidence suggests that libraries of all types make little use of their mission statements in communicating what they are about” (p.2). Thus, Wallace’s purpose in

writing this book is to provide “practical guidance and inspiration for writing a good mission statement, one that works as both a planning and a communication tool” (vi).

Wallace does this in four short chapters that discuss mission, marketing and mission, writing the mission statement, and putting it to work. She follows this with a 45-page chapter of sample mission statements, two short appendices, a brief list of suggested readings, and an index. Although she indicates that most of the mission statements included in her book were written before short one or two sentence statements became popular, she suggests that each of them meets some of the criteria of a good mission statement. Examination of these mission statements reveals that most of them are indeed very short, even if they do exceed one or two sentences. Wallace also encourages readers to share their own library mission statements by sending them to librarycomm@librarycomm.com for posting on her online collection.

The most important aspect of Wallace’s book is the examples for actually putting the mission statement to work (and I think that these ideas work for vision statements as well) by including these statements in the library’s communication plan. So what is a communication plan? Appendix B includes a template for any library to use in creating a marketing communication plan. And that leads us back to Siess’s work.

The first two chapters of Siess’s work are similar to Wallace’s in that these chapters explain how to start becoming more visible. She begins with the premise that it is customer service and the potential for improving customer service that sets the library apart from other information services. Once Siess has everyone up-to-date on the need for improved customer service, she then describes how to make constituents aware of what the library offers in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 3 covers creating and writing public relations plans and describes various publicity tools such as brochures, newsletters, press releases, etc. From there, she discusses public relations, a tool involving a more personal touch such as in open houses, exhibits, and elevator talk. She follows with a chapter on advocacy, the tool for pulling all of this work together in an effort to shape the future image of libraries and librarians. As Siess says, “Users may take the technology for granted, but they will always need the services we can provide—assuming that we let them know what we can do” (p. 121). The book ends with a list of sources cited, additional resources, and an index.

All in all, I highly recommend both books, especially if your library needs to be more visible. As I read them, I made copious notes in the margins about what I have not done, what I could do, and what I need to do. In fact, I think that I will re-read both of them on my next airplane trip. I believe that my library will benefit if I take the time to access whether or not we have followed through on all of those ideas that sounded so good to me upon first reading.

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